



# USCIS Welcomes Refugees and Asylees



U.S. Citizenship  
and Immigration  
Services

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# USCIS Welcomes Refugees and Asylees

U.S. Citizenship and Immigration Services (USCIS), part of the U.S. Department of Homeland Security (DHS), welcomes you to the United States as a refugee or asylee. We value your skills and talents, and we want to help you settle into your community and be successful in your life in the United States. We also want to share information about how you can become a U.S. citizen.

This brochure will help you learn about getting settled in the United States and about the rights, responsibilities, and importance of U.S. citizenship. Becoming a U.S. citizen gives you the same rights as all Americans and builds a sense of shared belonging for you and your fellow citizens.

## Rights and Responsibilities

As a refugee or asylee living in the United States, you have many rights, just like others living here. Some of these rights include freedom of speech, freedom of religion, and freedom of assembly.



You also have responsibilities. In the United States, everyone must follow the law. You need to understand U.S. laws because they may be different from the laws in other places you have lived. Learning about American history, government, and culture will help you feel at home here.

**You have the right to:**

- Live anywhere in the United States
- Work in the United States
- Leave and return to the United States under certain conditions
- Attend public school until a certain age, according to state laws
- Apply for an unrestricted Social Security card
- Apply for a driver's license or other form of government identification in your state or territory
- Apply to become a lawful permanent resident and U.S. citizen once you are eligible
- Request that your spouse or unmarried children receive asylum or refugee derivative status to live in the United States
- Report crimes or abuse to law enforcement and receive their assistance

**You have the responsibility and are required to:**

- Request permission to return to the United States before you leave by applying for a refugee travel document, even if you are an asylee
- Obey all federal, state, and local laws
- Pay federal, state, and local taxes, if applicable

- Register with the Selective Service if you are a male between 18 and 26 years old
- Inform USCIS of your new address no later than 10 days after you move
- Send your minor children to school
- Apply for lawful permanent resident status after 1 year in the United States if you are a refugee

## Getting Settled in the United States

In the United States, each level of government plays a different role in helping you get settled. You may come in contact with local, state, and federal government offices during your resettlement process.



Contact your state refugee coordinator, state refugee health coordinator, resettlement agency or a local community-based organization that works with immigrants to help direct you to the appropriate government assistance program. Many government assistance programs have time-limited eligibility periods that begin from the date you were granted asylum or admitted as a refugee.

If you need help learning English, you can enroll in an English class. Check with your resettlement agency, public library, social service agency, or place of worship to get information on English classes and other classes and services.

## The Next Steps in Your Immigration Process

If you entered the United States as a refugee within the past 2 years or were granted asylum status within the past 2 years, you may petition for certain family members to join you here. You may petition for the following family members:

- Spouse
- Child (unmarried and under 21 when you first applied for asylum or refugee status)

You must submit Form I-730, Refugee/Asylee Relative Petition, to USCIS within 2 years of being granted asylum or admitted as a refugee, or demonstrate humanitarian reasons for extending the 2-year period. This form is available at [uscis.gov/i-730](https://uscis.gov/i-730).

## Lawful Permanent Residence

A lawful permanent resident (Green Card holder) is someone who has been granted authorization to live and work in the United States on a permanent basis. As proof of that status, a person is given a Permanent Resident Card, commonly called a Green Card. Acquiring a Green Card also puts one on the path to being able to apply for full U.S. citizenship (more on that below).

- Refugees **must** apply for a Permanent Resident Card 1 year after arriving in the United States. Refugees must have 1 year of physical presence in the United States at the time they file the application.
- Asylees **may** apply for a Permanent Resident Card 1 year after being granted asylum. Asylees must have 1 year of physical presence as an asylee in the United States at the time they file the application.

To apply for lawful permanent resident status and get a Permanent Resident Card, file Form I-485, Application to Register Permanent Residence or Adjust Status. This form is available at [uscis.gov/i-485](https://uscis.gov/i-485). While there is a fee for asylees to file Form I-485, there is no fee for refugees to file Form I-485. Community-based organizations, including your local resettlement agency, can help you with this process.

## Refugees

If you are a refugee, you are required by law to apply for lawful permanent resident status 1 year after being admitted to the United States as a refugee.

### **Apply for lawful permanent residence**

File Form I-485, Application to Register Permanent Residence or Adjust Status. Refugees do not pay fees to file Form I-485 or for biometric services.

You are eligible to apply if you:

- Have been physically present in the United States for at least 1 year after being admitted as a refugee;
- Are physically present in the United States at the time you file your Form I-485;
- Are admissible to the United States as an immigrant; and
- Have not had your refugee status terminated.

Visit [uscis.gov/i-485](https://uscis.gov/i-485) and [uscis.gov/greencard/refugees](https://uscis.gov/greencard/refugees) for more information.

### **Apply for U.S. citizenship**

You may qualify for naturalization if you have been a lawful permanent resident for a certain number of years and meet all other eligibility requirements. Please visit [uscis.gov/citizenship](https://uscis.gov/citizenship) for more information.

## Asylees

If you are an asylee, you are eligible to apply for lawful permanent resident status 1 year after being granted asylum if you have maintained residence the entire time, but you are not required to apply.

### **Apply for lawful permanent residence**

File Form I-485, Application to Register Permanent Residence or Adjust Status, and pay the appropriate filing and biometric services fees.

You are eligible to apply if you:

- Have been physically present in the United States for at least 1 year after being granted asylum;
- Are physically present in the United States at the time you file your Form I-485;
- Continue to meet the definition of a refugee or be the spouse or child of a refugee;
- Are not firmly resettled in any foreign country;
- Are admissible to the United States as an immigrant; and
- Have not had your asylee status terminated.

Visit [uscis.gov/i-485](https://uscis.gov/i-485) and [uscis.gov/green-card/asylees](https://uscis.gov/green-card/asylees) for more information.

### **Apply for U.S. citizenship**

You may qualify for naturalization if you have been a lawful permanent resident for a certain number of years and meet all other eligibility requirements. Please visit [uscis.gov/citizenship](https://uscis.gov/citizenship) for more information.

## Citizenship

Citizenship is the common thread that connects all Americans. We are a nation bound not by race or religion but by the shared values of freedom, liberty, and equality. By becoming a U.S. citizen, you will have a voice in how our nation is governed.

Your conduct as a lawful permanent resident can affect your ability to become a U.S. citizen later. The process of becoming a U.S. citizen is called naturalization. You must meet all of the eligibility requirements to naturalize as a U.S. citizen.



In general, after a certain number of years as a lawful permanent resident, you can apply for naturalization. Refugees and asylees may apply for naturalization 5 years after the date of their admission to lawful permanent residence. Asylees are admitted to lawful permanent resident status as of the date 1 year before the approval of their Form I-485. Upon the approval of their Form I-485, refugees are admitted to lawful permanent residence as of the date of their arrival in the United States.

For a list of all naturalization eligibility requirements, visit [uscis.gov/citizenship](https://uscis.gov/citizenship). Some of the requirements include the following:

- You need to be physically present in the United States for a certain period of time.
- You need to have continuous residence in the United States.
- You need to have good moral character.
- You need to be able to speak, read, write, and understand basic English and have an understanding of U.S. history and government (civics).
- You need to support the principles and ideals of the U.S. Constitution and be willing to take an oath of allegiance to the United States.

To apply for naturalization, file Form N-400, Application for Naturalization, online at [uscis.gov/n-400](https://uscis.gov/n-400). You may also pay for Form N-400 and your biometric fee online. There are exceptions and modifications to the naturalization requirements for those who qualify. USCIS also provides accommodations for individuals with disabilities. Many community organizations, such as local resettlement agencies, can help you prepare for naturalization.



Certain benefits, rights, and responsibilities come with U.S. citizenship, including the ability to vote in federal elections, serve on a jury, travel with a U.S. passport, compete for federal jobs, and become an elected official.

## Contact USCIS

Visit [uscis.gov](https://uscis.gov) for additional information, to check your case status, or to find a USCIS office. You can call USCIS toll-free at 800-375-5283. For people who are deaf, hard of hearing or have a speech disability, call TTY 800-767-1833. Service is available in English and Spanish. You can also visit [uscis.gov/contactcenter](https://uscis.gov/contactcenter) for the USCIS Contact Center.

### USCIS Resources

#### **U.S. Citizenship and Immigration Services (USCIS)**

USCIS oversees lawful immigration to the United States. Learn how to apply for your Green Card, pursue U.S. citizenship, reunite with family, get permission to travel overseas, and more.

#### **Resources for refugees and asylees**

[uscis.gov/howdoi/refugeesasylees](https://uscis.gov/howdoi/refugeesasylees)

#### **Welcome to the United States: A Guide for New Immigrants**

This guide introduces the basic information you and your family need for everyday life in the United States. It describes your rights and responsibilities, suggests ideas for getting involved in your local community, and helps you plan for applying for U.S. citizenship once you become a lawful permanent resident.

[uscis.gov/newimmigrants](https://uscis.gov/newimmigrants)

#### **Settling in the U.S.**

This webpage provides you with information about the United States, education and child care, emergencies and safety, traveling outside of the United States, employment, getting settled in the United States, government benefits, health care, and money and finance.

[uscis.gov/tools/settling-us](https://uscis.gov/tools/settling-us)

## USCIS Resources

### Citizenship Resource Center

This website provides educational tools and information to help you prepare for U.S. citizenship.

[uscis.gov/citizenship](https://uscis.gov/citizenship)

### Avoid Scams

If you need legal advice on immigration matters, make sure the person helping you is authorized to give legal advice. Only an attorney or an accredited representative working for an organization recognized by the U.S. Department of Justice can give you legal advice.

[uscis.gov/avoid-scams](https://uscis.gov/avoid-scams)

[uscis.gov/avoid-scams/find-legal-services](https://uscis.gov/avoid-scams/find-legal-services)

### Forms

Use **Form I-765** to apply for work authorization, renew your authorization, or to replace your document.

[uscis.gov/i-765](https://uscis.gov/i-765)

Use **Form I-730** to bring your spouse or children to the United States.

[uscis.gov/i-730](https://uscis.gov/i-730)

Use **Form I-131** to request permission to return to the United States by obtaining a refugee travel document.

[uscis.gov/i-131](https://uscis.gov/i-131)

Use **Form I-485** to apply for lawful permanent resident status if you are in the United States.

[uscis.gov/i-485](https://uscis.gov/i-485)

Use **Form N-400** to apply for U.S. citizenship.

[uscis.gov/n-400](https://uscis.gov/n-400)

Use **Form AR-11** to ensure your address is updated with USCIS.

[uscis.gov/ar-11](https://uscis.gov/ar-11)

## USCIS Resources

### myUSCIS

Find up-to-date information about the application process for immigration benefits, tools to help you prepare for naturalization, and resources to find citizenship preparation classes and doctors in your local community. Learn how to file an application or request online and access information about your case by registering for an online account.

[my.uscis.gov](https://my.uscis.gov)

## Other Federal Resources

The following chart provides additional information about federal government services for refugees and asylees.

## Federal Government Resources

### **U.S. Department of Health and Human Services Administration for Children and Families Office of Refugee Resettlement (ORR)**

If you are a refugee, asylee, and derivative family member, you may be eligible to receive assistance and services through ORR. ORR funds and administers various programs that include cash and medical assistance, employment preparation, job placement, and English language training. Many of these programs have time-limited eligibility periods that begin from the date you were granted asylum or entered the United States as a refugee. ***You should explore whether you qualify for any of these programs as soon as possible if you are interested in any of them.***

State refugee coordinators/state refugee health coordinators

[acf.hhs.gov/orr/resource/orr-funded-programs-key-contacts](https://acf.hhs.gov/orr/resource/orr-funded-programs-key-contacts)

## Federal Government Resources

State programs and resources

[acf.hhs.gov/orr/state-programs-annual-overview](https://acf.hhs.gov/orr/state-programs-annual-overview)

Health insurance resources

[acf.hhs.gov/orr/health](https://acf.hhs.gov/orr/health)

Affordable housing resources

[acf.hhs.gov/orr/resource/finding-affordable-housing](https://acf.hhs.gov/orr/resource/finding-affordable-housing)

Employment resources

[acf.hhs.gov/orr/employment-resources](https://acf.hhs.gov/orr/employment-resources)

### **U.S. Department of State Bureau of Population, Refugees, and Migration Reception and Placement Program**

If you were approved for refugee status in the United States, you were sponsored by a resettlement agency participating in the Reception and Placement Program, which is run by the U.S. Department of State.

The sponsoring agency is responsible for placing you with one of its local offices and for providing initial services, such as housing, essential furnishings, food, clothing, orientation and assistance with access

to other social, medical, and employment services during your first 30 to 90 days in the United States. ***When you first arrive in the United States as a refugee, your local resettlement agency will be the first place you should turn for help getting settled.***

[state.gov/j/prm/ra/receptionplacement](https://state.gov/j/prm/ra/receptionplacement)

### **U.S. Department of State Bureau of Population, Refugees, and Migration Cultural Orientation Resource Exchange (CORE)**

Funded by the U.S. Department of State, CORE offers numerous cultural orientation resources for U.S.-bound refugees. This website includes materials in languages such as Arabic, Farsi, Kinyarwanda, Kiswahili,

## Federal Government Resources

and Somali. CORE will help you get culturally oriented in the United States. **Explore CORE now to learn more about employment, housing, healthcare, money management, and more to help you adjust to life in the United States.**

[settleinus.org/](http://settleinus.org/)

### U.S. Department of Labor (DOL)

DOL fosters, promotes, and develops the welfare of wage earners, job seekers, and retirees of the United States; works to advance opportunities for profitable employment; and assures work-related benefits and rights. **Take a look at [careeronestop.org](http://careeronestop.org). It can help you find jobs and training in your community.**

Workers' rights resources

[dol.gov](http://dol.gov)

American Job Centers (sponsored by DOL)

[careeronestop.org](http://careeronestop.org)

877-US2-JOBS (877-889-5627 (TTY))

### U.S. Department of Justice Immigrant and Employee Rights Section

The Immigrant and Employee Rights Section of the U.S. Department of Justice enforces the anti-discrimination provision of the Immigration and Nationality Act. This statute prohibits employers from discriminating based on citizenship status and national origin discrimination when hiring, firing, or recruiting or referring for a fee. It also prohibits unfair documentary practices and retaliation or intimidation. **If you think you are being treated unfairly as you try to get a job or at a job you already have because of where you come from, or because you are an asylee or refugee, the Immigrant and Employee Rights Section may be able to help.**

## Federal Government Resources

Resources about employment discrimination based upon citizenship or immigration status

[justice.gov/crt/immigrant-and-employee-rights-section](https://www.justice.gov/crt/immigrant-and-employee-rights-section)

800-255-7688 (800-237-2515 (TTY))

### **Social Security Administration**

A Social Security number is needed to get a job, collect Social Security benefits, and apply for other government services. **You need to get a Social Security number and card. Go to this website for specific information for refugees and asylees.**

[ssa.gov/people/immigrants](https://ssa.gov/people/immigrants)

800-772-1213 (800-325-0778 (TTY))

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